bilateral trade and also to catalyse the investment into each other's country. Some of the initiatives taken by both the governments include

(i) All trade in hard currency, on internationally competitive pricing and norms;

(ii) Extension of Mutual-Most-Favoured-Nation Treatment;

(iii) Encouragement to direct business level contacts, for example through trade fairs, and exhibitions, exchange of delegations, joint business councils, etc.;

(iv) Promotion of joint ventures and other forms of economic co-operation;

(v) Encouragement counter-trades and its variants;

(vi) Setting up of joint commission, joint committees and holding of these meetings;

(vii) Encouragement to better quality control;

(viii) Promotion of consignment exports and creation/leasing of warehousing facilities;

(ix) Encouragement of exchange of commercial visits;

(x) Encouraging setting up of infrastructure facilities like joint venture banks etc.

(c) both the countries are working out on the possibilities of setting up warehouses in each others country.

(d) and (e) Efforts are being made to avail of and explore the possibilities in this area.

Mobile Vans provided to Cater to RPDS in Thane Distt. of Maharashtra

2391. PROF. RAM KAPSE: Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) the number of blocks in Thane district of Maharasthra where mobile vans have been provided to cater to RPDS;

(b) whether any evaluation of the success of the above scheme in Thane district has been made; and

(c) whether Government intend to provide more vans to the above district by removing budgetary constraints?

THE MINISTER OF FOOD AND MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV): (a) Government of Maharashtra have reported that 21 mobile vans have been provided to Thane District.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) Funds are provided to State Governments, who in turn decide the district-wise allocation.

Expansion of Bauxite Mines and Aluminium Refineries of NALCO

2392. SHRIMATI JAYANTI PATNAIK: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal for the expansion of the bauxite mines and aluminium refineries of National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO);

(b) whether Government have approved the plan in this regard; and

(c) if so, the duration by which the expansion programme is expected to be completed?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA): (a) to (c) The proposal of National Aluminium Company Limited (NALCO) to expand the capacity of Bauxite Mines from 2.4 Million Tonnes Per year (MTPY) to 4.8 MTPY and Alumina Refinery from 0.8 MTPY to 1.575 MTPY, both situated at Damanjodi, at an investment of Rs. 1664.60 crores (June, 1996 price level) has been approved by the

Government. The expansion is to be completed in 51 months.

Extension of Creamy Layer Policy to SCs in UPSC Appointments

2393. SHRI R. MARGABANDU: Will the Minister of WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the policy regarding creamy layer is applied to Backward Classes in UPSC appointments; and

(b) if so, the reasons for not applying creamy layer criteria in the case of Scheduled Castes so as to provide opportunity to the really deserving SC candidates?

THE MINISTER OF WELFARE (SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The creamy layer criteria have been adopted in relation to OBCs keeping in view the relevant directions of the Supreme Court in Writ Petition No. 930 of 1990. Since these directions of the Supreme Court do not relate to Scheduled Castes, the creamy layer criteria have not been applied in their case.

Measures to Improve the Lot of Agricultural workers in Gujarat

2394. SHRI AHMED PATEL: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that for the unskilled agricultural workers in the State of Gujarat minimum wages have been fixed at Rs. 15 per day since 1990 which is the lowest in comparison to other States in the country;

(b) if so, whether Government have advised the State Government to revise and increase the minimum wages for agricultural workers in the State;

(c) if so, the details thereof and the reaction of the Government of Gujarat thereto; and

(d) other measures Government propose to initiate to improve the lot of agricultural workers in Gujarat?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM): (a) As per information furnished by the State Government of Gujarat, the minimum wages for the unskilled category of agricultural workers are Rs. 34/- per day. These are not the lowest wages in country.

(b) to (c) The Central Government have been advising the State Governments/Union Territory Administrations from time to time to revise the minimum rates of wages in accordance with the provision of the Act and as per the recommendation made in various fora. The steps recommended include the provision of a variable Dearness Allowance in the minimum rates of wages, revision of wages in two years and to fix wages are above the floor level minimum wage as suggested from time to time.

Government's move to seek industry's views on opening up of consumer goods industries

2395. DR. D. VENKATESHWAR RAO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India's commitment to World Trade Organisation provisions has prompted Government to seek industry's views on opening of the consumer goods industry and eliminate qualitative restrictions on their imports;

(b) if so, whether Government discussed this issue with all the organisations and industrialists;

(c) if so, their reaction thereto; and

(d) by what time final decision in this regard is likely to be taken?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH): (a) to (d) Article XI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, 1994 requires that no